Toy Rabbit

By Paula Puddephatt

Snowy had been Justine's favourite toy: a silky, pure white rabbit, with a pale gold bow. In truth, he was too loved to have remained pure white, and the ribbon had become frayed, over time. But Snowy would always be Justine's beloved rabbit friend. A much-needed comfort, since she had started school, the previous year.

One hot Saturday morning, Justine was reluctantly walking alongside her mother, Marion, with her little sister, Ellie, in the Mothercare buggy. Heading for the shopping precinct. Justine had been content at home, watching the TV.

Ellie, who was, in Justine's opinion, extremely spoilt, was screaming relentlessly: "Want! Want!" Pointing in Snowy's general direction. "Want bunny!"

"Stop being so mean to your sister, Justine," said their mother, at length. "Just let her hold the toy. You're a bit old for soft toys, anyway. It wouldn't hurt you."

But it did, ultimately. Because, one minute, the toy was in Ellie's chubby hands, and the next...

It might have been that moment when Justine turned to enjoy the flight of a peacock butterfly. Maybe. Or when she glanced across the street, and noticed a girl from school waving at her. She didn't even know the girl's name. She was older than Justine, and in Miss Wallace's class.

Snowy was there, and then he was not.

"Please, just let me go back and look for him, Mum," begged Justine.

"No, Justine. I won't tell you again. We don't have the time."

"It's all your fault, Ellie."

Ellie cried, for just long enough to gain Marion's sympathy. Then, she smirked, but only Justine noticed.

Ironically, on the return journey, Justine thought that she spotted Snowy, but her mother dragged her past the spot, claiming that it was "another toy", and pointing out that it was on the ground, and would be dirty.

A comparatively minor incident, but the loss of Snowy had impacted Justine.

Given all that had occurred since, and led to Justine, as an adult, becoming estranged from her parents and sister...

The Snowy incident had been an early indication of so much worse to come, and Ellie had remained the favoured daughter.